

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 STR-07 TRSE-00 /041 W
-----010220 280800Z /14
R 280601Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0480

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO MADRAS
AND CALCUTTA 27 MARCH 1978 AND IS REPEATED FOR YOUR INFORMA-
TION.

QUOTE:

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, IN
SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST IN MAHARASHTRA

1. WIDESPREAD LABOR UNREST CONTINUES IN THE STATE. ACCORD-
ING TO MAHARASHTRA LABOR COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, CURRENTLY THERE
ARE 17 UNITS (14,000 WORKERS) UNDER LOCKOUT AND 46 OTHERS
(25,000 WORKERS) HIT BY STRIKES. IN THE BOMBAY-THANE AREA
THERE ARE 40 CASES OF CLOSURES INVOLVING OVER 16,000 WORKERS.
AMONG THE LARGER OF THE AFFECTED UNITS ARE: BRITANNIA BIS-
CUIT CO., PREMIER AUTOMOBILES, STAR GLASS, WALLACE FLOUR MILLS,
CABLE CORP., ION EXCHANGE, ASSOCIATED BEARINGS, UNION CAR-
BIDE, STEEL PLANT, BOMBAY METAL ALLOYS, NESTERL BOILERS,
HINDUSTAN TRANSMISSION AND GLASS CONTAINERS. TWO TRADE UNION-
ISTS -- DR. DATTA SAMANT (INTUC) AND MR. R.J. MEHTA (INDEPEN-
DENT) AND A FEW CITU UNIONS HAVE LED MOST OF THE AGITATIONS.

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2. COMMENT: RELIABLE INDEPENDENT LABOR SOURCES CONSIDER
BOTH DR. SAMANT AND MR. MEHTA TO BE "MILITANT" AND "TOUGH"
BARGAINERS AND THAT THESE TRAITS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR
CONTINUED POPULARITY AND LEADERSHIP ROLE AMONG WORKERS.

3. BOTH DR. SAMANT AND MR. MEHTA TALKED WITH CONGEN LAST
WEEK. ORIGINALLY A DOCTOR, SAMANT CEASED PRACTICING A YEAR

AGO BECAUSE OF HIS INCREASING ATTENTION REQUIRED FOR TRADE UNION WORK. HE CLAIMS TO CONTROL 150,000 WORKERS IN 200 UNITS IN THE AUTOMOBILE, STEEL, REFRIGERATION, SOAP, ENGINEERING AND MACHINE TOOL INDUSTRIES IN THE BOMBAY-THANE AREA. DR. SAMANT STATED THAT AT PRESENT WORKERS IN 12 INDUSTRIAL UNITS UNDER HIS UNION LEADERSHIP ARE STRIKING FOR INCREASED WAGES AND BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS. HE EMPHATICALLY SAID THAT THE UNREST AMONG WORKERS IS DUE TO "ECONOMIC" DEMANDS AND ARE NOT "POLITICALLY MOTIVATED", AS IS OFTEN ALLEGED BY POLITICIANS AND MANAGEMENT. (HE ADDED THAT WORKERS ARE NOT REALLY POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS. SAMANT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL CONG-R CANDIDATE FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.)

4. MR. MEHTA (AN ACTIVE TRADE UNIONIST FOR OVER 30 YEARS, WHO CONTROLS ABOUT 20,000 WORKERS IN 50 ENGINEERING UNITS) SAID THAT WORKERS IN TWO UNITS (CABLE CORP. OF INDIA AND WALLACE FLOUR MILLS) UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP ARE CURRENTLY STRIKING FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS. ACCORDING TO MR. MEHTA, INTER-UNION RIVALRY, EROSION IN WORKERS' REAL INCOME, VICTIMIZATION BY EMPLOYERS AND POOR WORKING CONDITIONS ARE THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE CURRENT INDUSTRIAL UNREST IN MAHARASHTRA.

5. TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON STRIKE FUNDS, DR. SAMANT SAID THAT HIS UNIONS DO NOT HAVE ANY SUCH FUND. MR. MEHTA, HOWEVER, SAID THAT HIS UNIONS DO MAINTAIN A STRIKE FUND. HE SPECIFICALLY POINTED OUT THAT 800 WORKERS IN THE CABLE CORP. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHO HAVE BEEN ON STRIKE SINCE NOVEMBER 25, 1977 RECEIVE RS. 150 MONTHLY OUT OF THE UNION'S FUND. MEHTA SAID THAT THE MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THE UNION IS FROM THE INTEREST ON FIXED DEPOSIT. ALSO AT THE TIME OF SETTLEMENT OF A DISPUTE, A PORTION OF ANY WAGE INCREASE RECEIVED BY THE WORKERS IS SET ASIDE TOWARDS THE UNION FUND WHICH ENABLED HIS UNIONS TO BECOME FINANCIAL SOUND. COURTNEY UNQUOTE
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR DISPUTES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NEWDE04730
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780134-0116
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780318/aaaaapgb.tel
Line Count: 102
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5c3f81bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3183136
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LABOR UNREST IN MAHARASHTRA
TAGS: ELAB, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5c3f81bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014